


Chapter 5

Boosting Students' Performance, Career Readiness, and Earnings: An Analysis Based on the Context of Poverty Reduction

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ABSTRACT

The performance of students at secondary and tertiary levels of education is at the core of preparing them for different career opportunities and lifetime earnings potential. This is paramount in the American ideal of achieving ethnic and racial equality. Directly embedded in this ideal also is the belief that is discussed in earlier works that educational programs open opportunities for students to thrive and develop human capital. This chapter discusses in the context of poverty alleviation and equity theory that students' performance and career readiness are significant in achieving both academic success and higher levels of earnings.

INTRODUCTION

Education is strongly tied to employment, earning potential and poverty reduction. Proficiency in some subjects like Mathematics, Science, and related drops steadily as school poverty increases (Mass Insight Education & Research Initiative, 2007; Etim & Etim, 2020). Several scholars argue that in some societies, education is the great equalizer with benefits including gainful employment (Baum & Payea, 2005; Cattani & Crawford, 2013; Mitra, 2011; Descy & Tessaring, 2004). Writing on the impact of education in the USA, Growe and Montgomery (2003) indicate that all children are entitled to having access to both free and quality education including equal access that provides opportunity for them to develop their

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own human capital. According to Mitra (2011), “Graduating from high school improves the quality of health, reduces dependence on public health programs by 60 percent, and cuts by six times the rate of alcohol abuse” (p. 3). Baum and Payea (2005) gave these two important benefits for higher education:

- There is a correlation between higher levels of education and higher earnings for all racial/ethnic groups and for both men and women.
- Higher levels of education correspond to lower levels of unemployment and poverty, so in addition to contributing more to tax revenues than others do, adults with higher levels of education are less likely to depend on social safety-net programs, generating decreased demand on public budgets (p. 7).

This chapter examines issues of student performance, career readiness and earnings in the context of equity theory and poverty alleviation.

LITERATURE

Poverty Construct

Before delving into improving student performance, it is necessary to first examine the poverty construct and ways to alleviate poverty.

Several economists and social scientists have studied poverty for over a century. In his book, *Towards a Credible Poverty Framework: From Income Poverty to Deprivation*, Saunders (2004) summarized several definitions of poverty including one that dates back to 1899 as an effort to develop a credible poverty framework. A few of the definitions in Saunders (2004) are provided in this chapter. Seebohm Rowntree (1899):

A family is counted as poor if their total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities of merely physical efficiency.

Peter Townsend (1979):

Individuals' families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong.

Joanna Mack and Stewart Lansley (1985):

Poverty is an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities.

Amartya Sen (1992):

Poverty is the failure of basic capabilities to reach certain minimally acceptable levels. The functioning relevant to this ... can vary from such elementary physical ones as being well-nourished, being adequately

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